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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to determine the influence of changes in New York State political and legislative processes on the political behavior and strategies of education interest groups in seeking State policy change for education. Historical methods were utilized in examining the problem. As interest groups seek their objectives, they attempt to reduce conflicts of the party, the legislature, and the governor within the legislative process on particular issues. The study demonstrated that the rise of a strong executive branch to dominate the legislature reduced conflict in government as well as the number of viable points of access to the policy process available to interest groups. The ability of the governor to maintain controlled conflict will determine if education groups develop competitive or coalitional behavior. (Author)

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STATE POLITICAL PROCESS CHANGE AND EDUCATIONAL INTEREST GROUP POLITICAL BEHAVIOR

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State Political Process Change
and Educational Interest Group Political Behavior

Purpose

The objective of the study was to determine the influences of changes over time in New York State political and legislative processes on the political behavior and strategies of education interest groups in seeking state policy change for education. As interest groups seek their objectives, they attempt to reduce the conflicts of party, legislature and governor within the legislative process on particular issues. This is a political problem and its nature changes with the structural and functional changes in the legislative process. As the frameworks change, the interest groups must redefine the problem and solve it through changes in their political behavior or cease to be effective.

Conceptual Frame

Politics is the key to understanding legislative process rather than the formalities of introducing, debating and deciding on legislation. The outcomes for the actors, their stake in the political system and their influence on each other often have greater meaning than the substance of the policies made. This is not as crass as it sounds as the result is the continuation of the process by which ideas eventually become part of the society's value system and traditions.

In legislative process, the resolution of conflict between party, governor, legislature are essential to its continuation. Illustrations follow. The legislator faces a conflict between party and constituency in considering issues. His constituency returns him to office but the party supports him in his bid, partly on the basis of his embracing party ideologies. Parties generally do not, however, have any overarching structure on which the legislator is dependent. On the other hand, legislative parties rarely form party ideology. To the extent that party leaders within the process i.e., the legislative leadership and the governor, can impose

party discipline, they can effectively reduce the legislator's conflict of party and constituency within the legislative process. The opposite tack is also possible: harmonizing party objectives with many legislators' constituencies.

There is conflict between the governor and the legislature over the legislative program. The governor, in his legislative role, devises a program with a statewide constituency in mind. At a number of points it may be at variance with the legislators' views of the needs of their constituents and thus a threat to their re-election. Imposing party discipline, either by through his own office or through the legislative leaders, can go far in putting his program into action. If within his program, however, he can accommodate the desires of many constituencies, conflict may also be reduced.

One means of enforcing discipline is through the dispensing of government jobs to loyal adherents and projects in areas of the state where the help of its legislator is needed. (The more colorful terms are patronage and pork.) The party and the governor are usually in conflict over who gets to dispense what. Obviously, the party, particularly the legislative branch, would like to be able to reward campaign workers and contributors to bolster the local bases. The governor would rather withhold these favors to utilize them for obtaining votes for his program in the legislature. Gaining control of the dispensing generally means gaining control of the party machinery. How judiciously the governor uses the kick of party caucus and the carrot of patronage for reducing conflict in the legislative process may determine the success of his program.

Turning to the interest groups, it has been pointed out that they basically seek access to government, to the legislative process, for the purpose of furthering their objectives. The most important point for any group is to gain access to persons or groups in government who have influence on others in government. Not only must those reached have respect for the interest group and its aims but they must also be able to convince others involved in the

legislative process that appropriate action is needed somewhat along the lines suggested by the interest group. To convince a respected legislator that his constituency and others like it will benefit from the proposal is one example. Having a committee chairman favorably disposed to the group's ideas is another. Often, the head of an executive agency can be an influential voice with the governor. Thus, the interest group utilizes access to begin building consensus for its ideas among the actors in the legislative process.

The use of access points is tactical within the larger strategy of reducing conflict between party, legislature and governor. Strategy involves gaining allies among other organizations with similar objectives. It also means shaping the objectives to fit the kinds of access available.

There is a constant shifting, though, in the relationship between governor, party and legislature. Each would like to have greater control over the legislative process and each seeks ascendency over the other. As this occurs, the points of effective access change, move or close off to the interest groups. The imposition of party discipline on the legislature reduces the channels open to them through individual legislators. Access then must be made through the leadership. Where governors have achieved the means of taking legislative initiative, e.g., through the executive budget, and control of their executive departments, the office of the governor and the heads of departments become highly prized access points. A governor who has taken control of his party can close the local or state party offices as access points except he sees fit to maintain his own leadership.

In the politics of education, the education interest groups have the same task as any other interest group; finding ways of gaining consensus and building consent for their proposals within the legislative process. Effective access points must be found and utilized. The political strategy they employ is reflected in their political behavior and in the organizational structures they develop for the conduct of the strategy. Iannaconne's taxonomy

notes the behaviors and types of organization developed to carry out the political strategy.

1. Entrepreneurial - Each of several organizations, coming off of its own local bases, plys its own avenues into the legislative process. Seldom do they act in concert and each part of this disparate structural type operates its strategy in terms of the access points it develops.

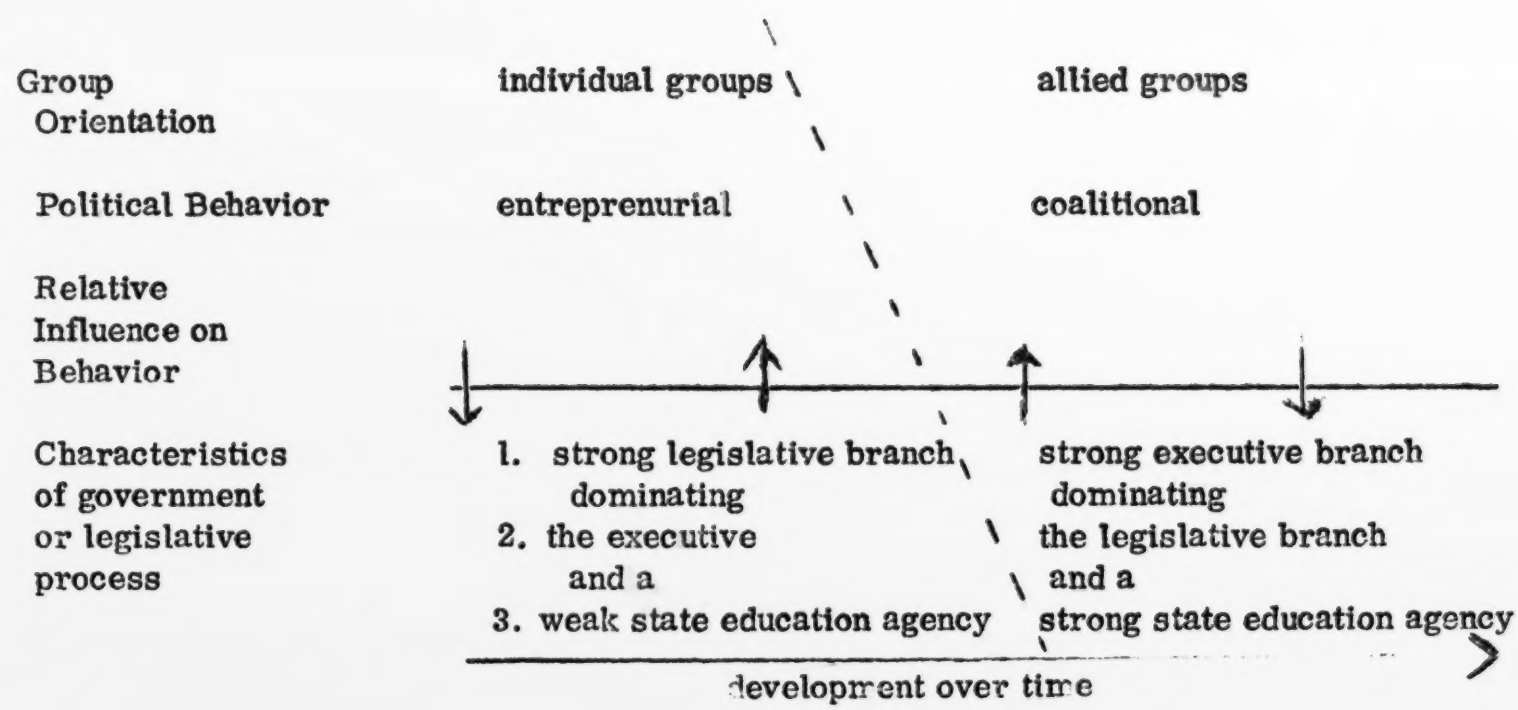
2. Co-optational - Several statewide organizations, acting in concert through a coaltion, often monolithic in structure, seek to co-opt actors and groups in the legislative process. The strategy is to embody within proposals a sufficient number of legislators' interests to obtain their cooperation.

3. Competitive - Several statewide organizations compete with each other in seeking educational policy change. Each is well organized itself but the structure is fragmented. They compete too points of access to legislative process.

4. Coalitional - Several statewide organizations act as a coalition with distinct spheres of influence in a syndical structure which includes both the interest groups and elements of government in a formal arrangement.

He goes on to state: "If the larger political system is undergoing realignment, it is probable though not inevitable that so also will the politics of education move from ... one phase to the next." The lack of data, particularly on the interaction between the political behavior of each phase and political process changes in the state, prevented him from making a more definitive statement. It is precisely the influence of this interaction which now must be accounted for in the politics of education.

Conflict resulting from the changing relationships may, in part, produce the new or next phase of behavior. New points of access to governmental process may be needed and usual accesses may be utilized differently. New alliances may have to be formed and even the structure of the interest groups may change when there is political realignment in the state. A diagram of behavior over time may be as follows:



As Iannacone has stated,

> "The more specific mode for changing the pattern of educational politics ... is found in changes exisiting in the legislative process... the educational interest groups must fit the legislative process to be effective. This process is unlikely to change to fit the educationist organizational pattern."

This would seem to be true in New York State and with some interesting variations in the developmental pattern.

New York State as a Case

Using a series of instances, it is possible to trace the changes in the legislative processes in New York and observe the changes in the activities of the educational interest groups. Compressing many events and nearly half a century is not an easy task but doing so highlights what occurred in the larger picture without becoming lost in the myriad of legislative battles fought by the interest groups.

Between 1920 and 1930, the State Legislature was beginning to recover from the body blows it suffered in the scandals of the early 1900's. The discoveries of corruption and the self-seeking behaviors of machine politics operating through state legislators severely curtailed the peoples' confidence in the two houses. The governors of this period gained in strength. At first they used the power of oratory to gain public backing from a statewide

constituency although they were still constitutionally dominated by the legislature's control of both the minimal budget process and appropriation. Reforms came slowly but, by 1927, Governor Alfred E. Smith was able to achieve executive department reforms which made the agency heads, except in education, responsible to the Governor. He also instituted the executive budget to be submitted by the governor and obtained the line item veto. Being able to present a budget gave the governor legislative initiative: he could state the amounts needed to achieve the objectives of his programs. Legislative revisions upward meant that the legislators took the onus for new taxes. Revisions downward could mean a scorching public denouncement by the governor to the effect that his program for the people's good was scuttled by the legislature.

The Board of Regents, New York's unique, august public policy board for all education in the state, public and private, was beginning to reassert its power following the reorganization of educational government in 1904. Their paramount position atop the educational system, extensive regulatory powers and great prestige set them apart from politics. Yet, the Board was a political force in education by their very pronouncements on educational policy. The alliance of the Regents with rural Republican interests added to the aura of their power: a factor utilized in legislative activity by their staff, the State Education Department. In later years when political influence in terms of access and trade-offs had to be demonstrated, the ephemeral political power of the Regents faded.

The educational interest groups' political behaviors coincided well with the legislative process in this period. The basic behavior was entreprenurial focusing on individual legislators but there were increasing signs of co-optive behavior. The Council of City and Village Superintendents with the aid of the Association of Secondary School Principals plied legislators friendly to their interests on a local basis but did very little with statewide problems. The New York State Teachers Association (NYSTA) sought and obtained a state

retirement system and the state first minimum salary law by the use of access to influential Senators and direct lobbying of other legislators. The Teachers Association also was moving toward a co-optational behavior.

On a number of statewide issues during these years, the Teachers Association sponsored joint meetings of the legislative committees of the several education groups with the objective of reaching blocs of legislators, particularly those with rural constituencies. To aid in these efforts, the prestige of the Regents was brought behind the proposals through the co-optation of the State Education Department. This device was often used to supplement the influence of the governor. This co-optive activity was reflected in the appointment of NYSTA's first executive secretary in 1923 and the man appointed was the former Administrative Deputy of the Commissioner of Education. Through efforts such as these two important measures for state school aid were passed: the Cole Rice bills in 1925 and the Friedsam formula in 1927.

By the mid-1930's, the situation had changed considerably. As the powers of the governor grew, the Legislature dominated by the majority party leadership and party discipline on both sides of the aisle was reasserted. Few legislators were independent enough to put constituency before the wishes of the leaders on party measures. Thus, the access to the Legislature was reduced as control increased. The governors had learned to utilize the executive budget well to put their programs into operation. With tight party discipline enforced by the legislative leadership, the budget became a potent weapon. Going to the people with issues if the Legislature balked became a real threat to legislators when done by consummate politicians such as Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt -- even when the opposition party controlled the Legislature.

The Board of Regents' decline as a force took place in these years. Governors would call on them for advice when it suited their purpose but would ignore the Board if it didn't. The Regents had no way of gaining access politically even though they were, constitutionally, the

governing body in education. In 1929, the Regents had moved to obtain greater political influence by an attempt to co-opt the educational interest groups through an organization called the Regents Joint Legislative Committee. This hope quickly faded when the Regents supported the Governor's call for a reduction in state aid in the depression year of 1931. The Teachers Association promptly withdrew its support of the coalition.

The educational interest groups maintained their access to the legislative process through rural legislators. Through these years the rural interests tended to prevail and elect the legislative leadership. Yet, the ability to affect educational legislation came more and more to mean obtaining input from the Governor either through congruency with his program or by his release of the leadership in the Legislature. Rarely was co-optation of legislators by itself effective.

The one major legislative achievement of the groups in this period came in 1934 when full state aid to schools under the Friedsam formula was preserved and future reductions during the depression years became less drastic than before. In this particular instance the groups, led by the Teachers Association and the New York State School Boards Association, managed to get Governor Herbert H. Lehman to ask for and follow the Regents' recommendation for full aid payment. Close cooperation with the State Education Department plus the ability of the groups to co-opt a number of rural legislators was the key to the victory.

The success was celebrated in the forming of the Educational Conference Board of New York State in September, 1934. Composed of the Teachers Association, School Boards Association, the Council of City and Village Superintendents, The Council of District Superintendents and the New York State Congress of Parents and Teachers, it would become known as the epitomy of educators organized for legislative activity in school finance at the state level. Characterized as a monolithic structure organized for co-optation of the legislature, it curiously enough never really co-opted the Legislature.

Thomas E. Dewey, elected Governor in 1942, realized fully the ability of the governor to control the legislative process. The term of office had been extended to four years in 1936 and, coupled with the executive budget and the line item veto, control was nearly complete. Going to the people was an accepted practice. The only loose ends were in matters of party. Dewey quickly moved to make the Republican Party in the State an extension of his office. All appointments all requests for public works had to be cleared through his close associates or himself. Effective access to the legislative process was almost totally controlled through the governor's office.

What this meant for the Educational Conference Board is clearly demonstrated in the state aid struggle of 1945. The Conference Board organizations quickly found that state aid to schools was the critical policy area on which they could agree and began a campaign for upward revision of the Friedsam formula in 1941. By 1945, the campaign had generated just enough pressure to bring Dewey to appoint a committee, the Feinberg Committee. He forced the Conference Board to deal with that group by bottling up the bills which were introduced by legislators friendly to the Board. The State Education Department supported the Board proposals before the Committee. The end result was a report by Feinberg accepting, in principle, the aid formula developed by the interest groups. Dewey acknowledged the contributions of the Conference Board when he signed the bill produced by the Committee but proceeded to allot state aid at less than the formula amounts.

The Conference Board had learned that their efforts must be directed at co-opting the governor's committees rather than trying to co-opt the Legislature. Access at other points was ineffective or simply closed. But even this turn of strategy would come to be ineffective.

In 1961-62, the Diefendorf Committee, appointed by Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller, sought to simplify the aid formulas of the 1940's which had become encrusted with special

provisions and variances as the state attempted to keep up with rising school costs. The Conference Board moved immediately to co-opt the Committee as it had done with previous committees. However, the strategy did not work for two reasons: first, the provisions sought by the Board seemed to open the State treasury to a raid by schoolmen essentially by-passing the Legislature, and second, the lobbying of the Conference Board was exposed by the press. The Legislature did vote more aid in 1962; more than recommended by the Committee, but the complete revised formula was not adopted. Insofar as the achieving policy change may be considered the objective of the educators groups, the effort in 1962 was less than successful.

Between 1962 and 1969, Rockefeller further tightened his grip on the legislative process, keeping conflict with the Legislature at a minimum through careful tailoring of his programs to undercut the opposition. This, plus judicious use of patronage and public works, permitted him to get his program through intact even in the two years in which the opposition party controlled the Legislature. The Governor's control of his own party was such that he could impose cutbacks in state programs in the years when he did not want to seek new taxes. No real revolutions were started in the Legislature as party leaders at the district level worked with the Governor to keep legislators in line.

In addition, the Office of the Governor was expanded for the purpose of bringing potential issues to the attention of the chief executive before they became openly troublesome. Through his Secretary, his counsels and the program associates responsible for the several major areas of government, such as labor, business, welfare and education, problem solutions were put into his program or, if appropriate, solved through casework by his staff. A third strategy was to send the problem to the appropriate department or committee with orders to solve it. In the usual division of spheres, problems with sensitive political implications were kept close to the Office of the Governor, more administrative ones went to the agencies.

The Educational Conference Board came to realize what had happened to their co-optational strategy when they sought to fight the Governor on his cutbacks for education in 1969. As part of an overall retrenchment in state expenditures Rockefeller imposed a 5 per cent across the board reduction and went all out to get it passed. Education suffered only a 3 per cent effective reduction due to the fact that school aid is paid on the school year in two halves of two state fiscal years. The really hurtful part for schoolmen, however, were the proposed changes in parts of the aid formula and special aid measures. These would result in less aid in successive years, not just 1969-70. Ostensibly, the Governor told the educational interest groups that they could have full aid if they could convince the Legislature. They could not as it meant a rise in state taxes would have to be voted. The educators were forced to witness the bankruptcy of the co-optational strategy as their legislative friend, the Chairman of the Senate Education Committee, led the floor debate for the Governor's proposed aid changes.

Conclusions

The examination of the legislative process and the political behavior of the educational interest groups in New York State has dealt with the ability of the groups to bring about reductions in conflict between legislature, governor and party for attaining policy change. The use of access points to the process by the groups and the control of access by the actors and groups within government was a central concept.

Results indicate that the rise of a strong governorship, dominating the legislature, reduced conflict in the legislative process. Party discipline was enforced in the legislature particularly as the governor obtained new powers, such as the executive budget, which put legislative initiative in his hands. Later, as the governor was able to take control of his own political party and integrate it into his role as the developer of statewide programs, conflict with party practically disappeared. Finally, the office of the governor increasingly

began to reach out for problems and assign them for solution before they reached a stage of severe political repercussion. All of these developments reduced the number of effective points of access to the legislative process.

Co-optive political strategy, developed earlier by the educational interest groups for influencing a more co-equal legislature in the matter of state aid, was then utilized to induce the governor to modify his policy proposals. Basically, the groups attempted to generate pressure from local jurisdictions and through the legislative leadership so that the governor would either modify his program or establish a committee to examine the problem. The education coalition would then try to co-opt the committee, knowing that the governor would be identified with its report. Thus, the committees became the effective access point for a co-optive strategy. This approach, too, had its limitations. The governor by simply selecting or electing to deal in dollar amounts for the given year instead of adopting proposed formula changes, put the groups in the position of having to renew their legislative effort each year.

Major changes in educational policy for the state, particularly in finance, must now be proposed or have endorsement through the governor's office. The structural and functional framework of the legislative process has been changed in such a manner that other access points are relatively ineffective. Co-optation, as practiced by the educational interest groups may have run its course.

Implications

The paper has handled only a few variables in the larger picture of public policy-making for education. Other forces are at work changing that picture including collective negotiations, the rise of teachers' militancy, incipient dissatisfaction with the schools among several socio-economic groups. There are indications that these are contributing to the slow breakdown of the Conference Board coalition as much as its inability to change its political behavior to meet the changes in legislative process. If the education groups cannot become

more effective in the policy change process these other variables will hasten the fragmentation of the coalition and result in the competitive behavior of such a structure as Iannaccone indicates. If the governor cannot maintain the tight control he has now over the legislative process, that is, if legislators or party leaders break away to seek greater political results for themselves in education issues, fragmentation and competition may again result if each interest group believes that it can satisfy its objectives through newly opened access points. The first is a possibility; the second is doubtful especially if Rockefeller is returned for a fourth term.

A more likely change is to some syndical form as in Iannaccone's taxonomy. The legislative process is such now that a permanent study and recommending group for a number of education issues, composed of legislators, education department officials, interest group people and representatives of the governor's office could provide the governor with an ideal extension of the control he now has. The political behavior could be coalitional as Iannaconne indicates or it could become co-optive. The coalitional behavior would come about if the governor maintains control over the issues which it would handle. If only specific, designated issues in educational policy went into this study group, i.e., finance, control might effectively be removed from the governor and into the legislature through the group.

There are two roadblocks to this development: New York City and the Regents. The City's special interests and Regents positions in the state's education of governance cannot be pushed aside. What accommodations can be made for them is difficult to say but their interests would certainly have to be represented more than minimally.

Finally, I would not be greatly surprised if the State Commission on the Quality, Cost, and Financing of Elementary and Secondary Education, (the Fleischmann Commission) recommended a syndical structure as a way of balancing the interests of the people, the

State, the Legislature and the education groups. The developing battle for state aid in 1971 is already pointing up some yearning for instrumentalities, other than those subject to "political vagaries", to recommend state policy changes in education.

R. E. Jennings
1/20/71

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